



The Comptroller General  
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

## Decision

Matter of: Nova Piping Systems  
File: B-228968  
Date: November 10, 1987

---

### DIGEST

Protest that in soliciting bids to replace pipe system agency should permit firm to use direct conduit installation method instead of specifying shallow trench method is denied where specification is based on a proper 25-year life cycle cost analysis, as required by agency instruction, showing that the shallow trench method is the more economical one.

---

### DECISION

Nova Group Inc., protests as unduly restrictive invitation for bids (IFB) No. F32605-87-B-0037, issued by Grand Forks Air Force Base, North Dakota, for the replacement of the existing hot water pipe system. Nova complains that the IFB requires that the majority of the pipe be laid using the shallow concrete trench method. Nova contends if a proper life cycle cost analysis had been performed prior to issuance of the IFB, it would have shown that installing pipe by the direct buried conduit method is a more economical approach than the shallow concrete trench method.

We deny the protest.

According to the Air Force, before issuing the IFB a life cycle cost analysis was prepared in accordance with Air Force criteria as stated in Engineering Technical Letter (ETL) 86-18. Based on this analysis, the Air Force estimated that the maintenance and repair costs over the next 25 years for the shallow trench system was approximately \$24,000 less than for the direct buried system. Upon receipt of Nova's protest, the Air Force performed a second analysis using additional information, which showed that the costs for the shallow trench system to be approximately \$73,000 less than for the direct buried system.

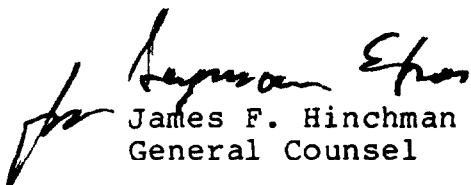
When a protester challenges a specification as unduly restrictive of competition, the procuring agency must

040561

establish prime facie support for its contention that the restriction imposed is reasonably related to its needs. Once the agency establishes this support, the burden then shifts back to the protester to show that the requirement complained of is clearly unreasonable. Military Services, Inc. of Georgia, B-221384, Apr. 30, 1986, 86-1 CPD ¶ 423.

Nova has not met its burden to show that the Air Force's decision to adopt the shallow trench method was clearly unreasonable. While Nova has not been furnished a copy of the Air Force's cost analyses, Nova's only evidence to support its view of what a proper analysis would show is the fact that in other procurements Nova, offering to use the direct buried conduit approach, underbid offerors proposing the shallow trench method. That fact, however, does not refute the Air Force's determination that in this instance the shallow trench method is economically more feasible. First, a life cycle cost analysis is designed to estimate all costs over a 25-year period, including maintenance and repairs. Second, the record shows that the result of a life cycle cost analysis for pipe replacement depends on a number of variables, including the size of the pipe to be used and the optimum routing for the particular project, so that results in one procurement would not dictate the results of an analysis in another one.

In sum, Nova has not shown that the Air Force, based on the life cycle cost analyses, has acted unreasonably in specifying the shallow trench method for the majority of the project. See Centurial Products, 64 Comp. Gen. 858 (1985), 85-2 CPD ¶ 305; Nova Piping Systems, B-225481, Sept. 17, 1986, 86-2 CPD ¶ 312. The protest is denied.

  
James F. Hinchman  
General Counsel